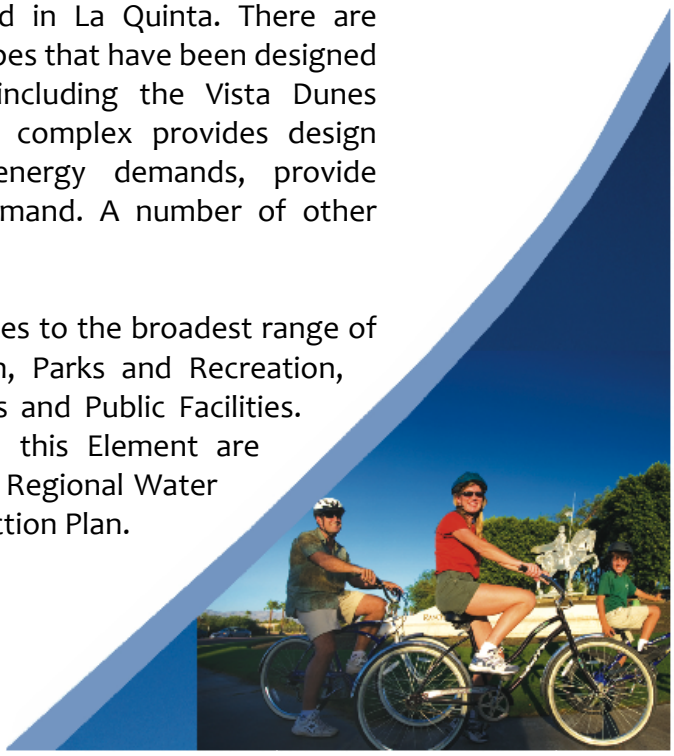
LIVABLE COMMUNITY

PURPOSE

The Livable Community Element is not a state mandated element, but is an element that La Quinta believes is important to the long term quality of life of its residents. Many components of the natural and man-made environment are a part of creating a livable community: the conservation of natural resources, including water conservation; the reduction of air pollution and greenhouse gases; high quality community design and the replacement of inefficient appliances and fixtures in existing homes and businesses; efficient use of the car, and the expansion of other, non motorized means of transportation; and healthy living practices which help to improve the health of residents.

This Element will help the City build a more cohesive community through the conservation of resources, enhancement of the built environment, encouraging transportation options that do not rely as much on the automobile, and improving the community's health. Many programs are already being implemented in La Quinta. There are existing examples of buildings and landscapes that have been designed using resource conserving techniques, including the Vista Dunes Courtyard Apartments. The Vista Dunes complex provides design elements and features that reduce energy demands, provide renewable energy, and reduce water demand. A number of other programs are described further below.

Within this General Plan, this Element relates to the broadest range of elements, including Land Use, Circulation, Parks and Recreation, Open Space, Air Quality, Water Resources and Public Facilities. Many of the concepts and programs in this Element are interconnected with State Building Codes, Regional Water Plans, and the City's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan.



BACKGROUND

The City of La Quinta has grown for a number of reasons, including its wide range of housing stock, its varied economic base, and its natural setting. As the City continues to grow, it is important that its assets be preserved and enhanced, and that future residents, visitors and business people experience the same quality of life as past and current residents have.

An important tool available to the City in maintaining and enhancing quality of life is its ability to provide choices to residents, visitors or businesses. These choices include whether a family wants to live in a home, an apartment or a condominium; whether a resident drives, walks, bicycles or takes the bus to work; or whether he shops for food at a supermarket or a farmers' market.

This Element addresses ways in which the City can sustain and enhance the natural and built environment to assure that these choices are available in the future, and ultimately improve the quality of life for everyone in La Quinta. The quality of our air and water, the ability to reduce energy use and save money, high quality development options and the improvement of all types of transportation systems are all discussed below to provide the broadest menu of options for the City's decision makers in the future.

Conservation of Natural Resources

The conservation of natural resources is a major component of a livable community. Each new development creates demands for water, energy, and contributes to air pollution in the City and region. Implementing conservation measures will not only help the environment, but will also provide cost savings to residents and business owners, and reduce the City's own operational costs.

Water Resources

The City of La Quinta is located in a desert, and averages only 3.31 inches of rain per year.[2] As a result, La Quinta and all communities in the Coachella Valley rely on groundwater as the primary source of potable drinking water and irrigation. Continued growth in the Valley has increased demand for groundwater, and has led to a decline in groundwater levels. When more water is pumped out of the aquifer than can be replenished, the resulting loss is called "overdraft." In

2 "Technical Background Report to the Safety Element of La Quinta 2035 General Plan Update", prepared by Earth Consultants International, Inc., June 2010.

2009, the CVWD reported that a total of 160,000 acre-feet of water was pumped over water replenished, resulting in an overdraft of 23,912 acre-feet, in the Lower Whitewater Subbasin, which serves the City and other communities in the eastern Coachella Valley. [3]

Imported water from the Colorado River and new replenishment programs implemented by the CVWD have helped alleviate declines, but both rely on outside sources of water. In 2010, approximately 300,000 acre-feet of water per year have been allocated from the Colorado River to the eastern Coachella Valley, primarily for agricultural irrigation. Although continued importation of water will help to replenish the aquifer, a more resourceful alternative is to reduce the amount of water pumped by the CVWD, which will have a direct impact on overdraft. Conservation techniques have already been implemented, and new measures are being developed to lower the amount of water used by each household and business in the City. Some of the existing programs include:

- **Coachella Valley Water District Urban Water Management Plan:** The Coachella Valley Water District has developed programs for reducing water use throughout the Valley. Implementation of conservation programs included in the Plan have already helped reduce water demand, particularly through the use of recycled water for irrigation at local golf courses. The CVWD also implemented its Landscape and Irrigation System Design Criteria Ordinance as a result of the Plan, which provides specific guidelines for local communities to reduce overall water use, eliminate water flowing down streets, and establish limited grass allowances at local golf courses. The CVWD will continue to be a source for new programs geared toward water conservation. The CVWD should continue to expand the availability of recycled water, which will expand the use of non-potable water for golf courses and landscaping.

- **City Landscape Ordinance:** The City has already been proactive in water conservation by incorporating strict new outdoor

3 "Engineer's Report on Water Supply and Replenishment Assessment: Lower Whitewater River Subbasin Area of Benefit", CVWD, April 2010.

water use standards through the implementation of CVWD's landscaping ordinance. The City adopted Title 8, Chapter 8.13 of the Municipal Code, Water Efficient Landscaping, on February 5, 2010 to reduce water usage for new and rehabilitated landscaping projects. The Ordinance requires the use of drought resistant and desert friendly plants, reduced use of turf and efficient irrigation design and equipment. As new technology is developed, the Ordinance should be updated to incorporate its use.

1. **CalGreen Code:** As of January 1, 2011, all qualifying new residential and nonresidential buildings in California will need to abide by water saving measures called out in the 2010 California Green Building Standards, or CalGreen Codes. The CalGreen Codes require that indoor water use be reduced by 20% through the use of water efficient fixtures. CalGreen also requires irrigation controls that monitor soil and weather conditions and eliminate wasteful watering. Over the next 25 years, increasingly stringent codes will further reduce water use.

2. **Federal Water Saving Programs:** The United States Environmental Protection Agency has created the WaterSense label for various products, including toilets, sinks, showerheads, and urinals that save water. As an example, replacing an older toilet with a WaterSense labeled toilet can save nearly 11 gallons per toilet per day, or 4,000 gallons per year. A home equipped entirely with WaterSense fixtures can save approximately 10,000 gallons of water per year.[4]

Water conservation in La Quinta is essential to reduce the overdraft of local groundwater, and protect future resources. Water conservation must include all types of water use – from landscaping to indoor fixtures, and must include new and existing development. The programs described above provide the foundation for reducing water demand. This Element can allow the City to expand programs that promote water conservation now and into the future.

[4] www.epa.gov/WaterSense/products/index.html, December 10, 2010.

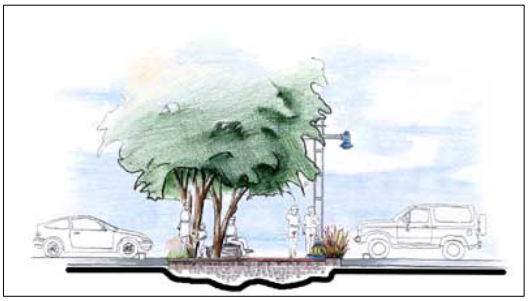
Stormwater Runoff and Water Quality Protection

The reduction of stormwater runoff, which leads to surface water pollution and groundwater pollution, is also important to the preservation of water resources. Increased runoff and pollution is caused by the increasing amount of non-porous surfaces found throughout the built environment. Natural environments allow water to percolate through the soil. Roads, parking lots, roofs and other non-porous structures cause runoff to flow into storm drains, channels and streams. Non-porous surfaces collect pollutants, such as oil, pesticides, and other chemicals, which are carried by runoff into local watersheds, threatening water quality. In La Quinta, the Whitewater River Channel is the main collection point of local runoff. This watercourse is also an important source for groundwater replenishment. Increased contamination has the potential to threaten groundwater supplies and sensitive habitat, especially in and around the Salton Sea, where the Whitewater River ends.

Existing state and federal regulations, including the Federal Clean Water Act, are working to protect water quality and reduce runoff and pollution. The Clean Water Act regulates runoff through the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). The NPDES regulates what are called "point sources" of pollution, which include discharge from commercial, industrial, municipal, and other buildings. In La Quinta, the Colorado River Basin Regional Water Control Board is responsible for the NPDES permit process. The Board also requires that new development use Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPP) and Best Management Practices (BMP) to reduce impacts from runoff during construction, and also during life of the project.

La Quinta implements the requirements of NPDES with all new development. In addition, design options such as vegetated swales, buffers, and detention basins in new development projects can help to reduce stormwater pollution.

Bioswales in parking lots can be built to help capture runoff. Bioswales also provide opportunities to breakup the monotony of large parking lots, and provide healthier environments for plants. Other measures that should be encouraged at the local level are the use of permeable materials, such as pavers, cobblestone, and crushed stone for the construction of roads, sidewalks, parking lots and driveways. Design techniques used to reduce runoff from both residential and non-residential will help La Quinta improve water quality.



Air Quality

Air is an important natural resource, and human health is dependent on clean air. Harmful air leads to health related problems including lung disease, heart disease, asthma and birth defects. Air quality issues have become more common in Southern California as it has continued to grow. The combination of geography, the dependence on automobile travel, and growth have combined to create high levels of air pollutants.

The Coachella Valley generally has cleaner air than areas west of the mountains, but the Valley does have air quality concerns. Air Pollution is caused mainly by cars, diesel trucks, and buses. Other sources include construction activities, heating and air conditioning units, lawn mowers and blowers, and other non-mobile sources. The Air Quality Element and the General Plan EIR provide detailed descriptions of the types of air pollutants, including carbon monoxide, sulfur oxide, nitrogen oxide, ozone, lead, particulate matter and volatile organic compounds.

In more recent years, greenhouse gases have gained notoriety. Greenhouse gases are caused by the burning of fossil fuels, and include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, chlorofluorocarbons, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulfur hexafluoride, and aerosols. Greenhouse gases have been linked to climate change, and are believed to be responsible for global warming. State legislation, including the Global Warming Solutions Act (AB32), calls for a

reduction in greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020, representing a 30% reduction State-wide. As part of its local implementation of AB32, La Quinta has developed a Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan, and aims to reduce CO2e emissions in compliance with State mandates.

The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan includes a comprehensive inventory of greenhouse gas emissions generated City-wide, including those generated by local government activities. Future emissions of greenhouse gases are projected, reduction targets set, and policies and programs are proposed to provide the City with tools to meet State requirements.

Improving air quality is a regional problem and requires a cooperative effort of state, regional and local agencies. The South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) regulates air quality for the region, and has adopted Air Quality Management Plans to meet federal and State Clean Air Act requirements. The SCAQMD also has adopted plans that address toxic air pollutants.

The most significant source of air pollution in La Quinta is from automobile emissions. Automobile emissions create high levels of ozone, carbon monoxide, and also greenhouse gases. Efforts to reduce emissions from automobiles can result in significant improvements to air quality and help reduce the greenhouse gases that lead to global warming. A reduction in auto emissions can be achieved in two ways: by reducing the number of trips people take in their automobiles; and by improving the technology which runs those automobiles. Reducing vehicle trips requires developing pedestrian friendly environments and encouraging alternative modes of transportation. The City can expand alternative transportation in a number of ways:

- Improving and expanding the multi-use path network that exists currently throughout the City, and making it accessible to multiple users, including pedestrians, bicyclists and golf cart riders.
- Expanding the City's golf cart routes.
- Facilitating the use of Neighborhood Electric Vehicles.

- Improving and expanding sidewalks and pedestrian trails to assure safe travel for pedestrians.
- Including bike racks in development plans for both private and public development.
- Encouraging the expansion of bus service through the SunLine Transit Agency.
- Implementing Transportation Demand Management for large employers (please see the Circulation Element for a description of Transportation Demand Management).

The technological improvements to the automobile, including better emissions control for gasoline and diesel vehicles, and hybrid, natural gas and electric vehicles, will come from elsewhere. The City can, however, facilitate and encourage these technological advances by making it easier to operate an alternative fuel vehicle in the City through:

- Installation of charging stations at public parking lots.
- Encouraging the installation of charging stations at commercial shopping centers and employment centers.
- Encouraging alternative fuel fueling stations in the City.
- Providing incentives for alternatively fueled vehicles, such as preferred or covered parking, at public facilities.

Energy Resources

The conservation of energy resources is another important component of the Livable Community Element. Although there are no electric or natural gas power plants in La Quinta, the demand for electricity and natural gas from City residents and businesses increases air pollution elsewhere. The production of electricity and natural gas is dependent on the burning of fossil fuels. The higher the demand for electricity and natural gas, the higher the emissions from the plants that produce them. A reduction in energy use will help reduce the amount of air pollutants and greenhouses gases generated by electricity and natural gas production. Another important way in which to reduce the pollution generated by energy production is the use of alternative energy – solar and wind power – to generate electricity.

Current Electric and Gas Use

The average household's electricity demand is 16,798 (kilowatt hours) kwh per year in La Quinta. There are currently approximately 23,489 households within the City, and 801 households in the Sphere of Influence. These households use approximately 408,023,420 kwh of electricity in one year. Commercial uses, such as retail stores and office

buildings, have an estimated demand of 57.88 kwh per square foot per year. In La Quinta, commercial uses consume 371,244,404 kwh of electricity annually.

Natural gas demand for a household in La Quinta is approximately 29,093 cubic feet per year, and the average commercial demand is approximately 53.22 cubic feet per square foot per year. The City generates a need for approximately 1,024,720,473 cubic feet of natural gas annually.

The City has little control over either the production or the consumption of energy. It can, however, take advantage of State regulations aimed at reducing energy demand, which will benefit La Quinta:

- **Executive Order S-20-04:** Governor Schwazernegger signed Executive Order S-20-04 in 2004 to reduce energy use in state-owned buildings by 20% by 2015 from 2003 levels, and encourage the private commercial sector to do the same. It created the Green Building Action Plan to establish specific measures to attain the targeted energy use reduction, including requiring all new State buildings and major renovations to abide to certain LEED standards; meet Energy Star rating of at least 75 by 2015; and reduce the volume of energy purchased from the grid. The Action Plan also calls on the California Public Utilities Commission to fund a campaign to inform the private sector on ways to reduce energy use by 20%.5 Although private residential and nonresidential buildings are only encouraged, and not mandated to abide by policies of the Green Building Action Plan, they are required to abide by new Energy Efficiency Standards adopted by the California Energy Commission.

- **CEC Energy Efficient Standards:** The California Energy Commission adopted Energy Efficiency Standards for all new residential and nonresidential construction to reduce greenhouse gases. All new construction of residential and non-residential buildings in La Quinta as of January 1, 2010 are required to abide by the Energy Efficiency Standards implemented through California Building Code Title 24. New homes, are required to include at least 50% of kitchen lighting be LED, compact fluorescent or similar high efficiency fixtures;

5 "State of California Green Building Action Plan, http://www.energy.ca.gov/greenbuilding/, accessed December 10, 2010

double pane windows; cool roofs, and other design techniques to reduce heat loss. Non-residential development is also subject to new more efficient requirements for mechanic systems, outdoor lighting, sign lighting and refrigerated warehouses.

- **CalGreen Code:** The CalGreen Code was developed as part of the California Building Code's Title 24, which addresses energy efficiency. The Code began as a voluntary program, but now imposes standards on new construction. The 2010 CalGreen Code provides voluntary measures for energy efficiency for both residential and nonresidential construction.

Energy Reduction Measures

Reducing energy use in La Quinta will require efforts to reduce both the demand, and change the source of the supply. Programs to reduce demand must be considered for both existing and future development. Within the City, the vast majority of land is already built out. As a result, the demand for energy is generated by existing equipment and fixtures, which are older and less efficient. The City can see considerable reductions in energy use if older appliances and incandescent lighting fixtures are replaced with high efficiency ones. The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan has been completed with just those targets in mind. The Plan includes a number of measures which could significantly reduce the City's use of energy:

- Completing energy audits for larger users, in conjunction with the Imperial Irrigation District.
- Installation of solar panels at City facilities.
- Solar panel retrofitting programs for single family homes and commercial projects.
- Requiring Energy Star appliances in new homes, and partnering with other agencies to provide rebates for Energy Star appliances in existing homes.
- Encouraging cool roofs and green roofs for new commercial projects.
- Requiring that commercial buildings be wired for solar roof panels, to allow future installation.

The solar panel installation programs described above tie directly to the needed change in

the way power companies secure their supply. The installation of solar panels in the City will have a direct impact on Imperial Irrigation District's (IID) supply. As large scale solar farms are developed in the southern California deserts, they will also reduce the amount of energy generated by oil and coal. IID also has invested in geo-thermal power generation in Imperial County, and other alternative energy sources. The western Coachella Valley has been, and will continue to be a source of wind energy. These projects are likely to be expanded in the future, and further reduce dependence on polluting power generation. Although the City has limited direct ability to change the power grid, it can continue to educate and inform the use of alternative power generation through its intergovernmental contacts, including CVAG, State representatives, and federal elected officials.

The Built Environment

The built environment includes all roads, buildings, and infrastructure in the City. How these are designed and constructed directly affects how the City impacts the environment, natural resources, and its residents' health. The General Plan, and this Element in particular, encourage a built environment that promotes quality community design; and respect for natural resources.

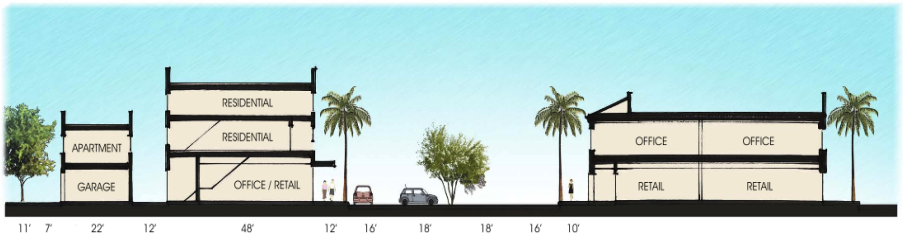
Community Design

Community design focuses primarily on quality of life issues – the pleasing appearance of a project; having sufficient parks to accommodate everyone's needs; the ability of residents to travel from one location to the other without delay or impediment; and a balanced economy which provides jobs for residents, and sufficient revenues to pay for City services. Livable community design is an extension of these principles, and focuses on assuring that the City "lives within its means" in all aspects. That is to say that the use of any resource is balanced with its replenishment. In this case, "resource" is used in the broadest sense: water and air are both traditional resources; and a healthy economy is also considered a resource.

Land Use

The most important commodity to any community is land. Historically, land has been developed using regulations that encourage land use segregation, to protect residential uses from more intense and potentially conflicting uses. The result is a separation between residential areas and the daily functions of life, including working, shopping, and recreation. The use of automobiles has encouraged this type of development pattern, and over time has had negative effects – air pollution, more and more paved roadways, and the isolation of

people in the community. The resurgence of old principles in land use – principles by which most European and older American cities were built -- call for land uses that are more interconnected, compact, and that offer a mix of uses, providing opportunities for people to live, work, and shop within the same area or building. Mixed use development can be built vertically or horizontally. Many vertically integrated mixed-use buildings provide for commercial retail on the ground floor, sometimes offices on the second floor, and residential units above. Mixed-use developments can also provide for retail and offices mixes, as well as live/work environments. Horizontal mixed use projects are either attached or detached, and are located in a compact development. Many times this includes commercial buildings along a main road, with residential units directly behind the commercial building. The key to any successful mixed use project is the development of inter-connections between uses, allowing residents and businesses to co-exist without conflict, and providing residents with work and shopping opportunities that do not include their cars. In order for mixed use buildings to create an environment which is comfortable for a pedestrian, buildings should be located next to the sidewalk or walkway, rather than behind large parking lots. Another key component of pedestrian friendly buildings is good building design and proper scale. The combination of various roof lines, protecting storefront windows, building mass which does not overwhelm the pedestrian, and unique architectural elements that provide visual relief are all important to encourage pedestrian activity. Successful mixed use developments promote a sense of place, and become gathering places for residents and visitors to enjoy.

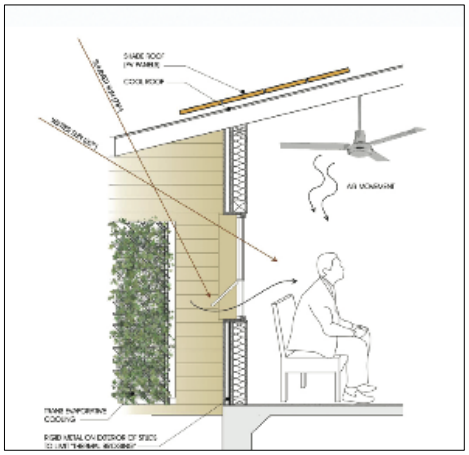


As described in the Land Use Element, this General Plan creates the Mixed Use zoning designation for commercial lands along Highway 111 and in the Village. Mixed Use projects proposed in the future must incorporate attractive, useable and safe public spaces in order to be successful. It is also important to note that existing development can be adapted to incorporate these principles, and that because the

majority of the City is already developed, redevelopment of existing projects to incorporate these principles will be an important component of a successful livable La Quinta (please see "Retrofitting Existing Development," below).

Resource Efficient Building Design

The design and construction of new buildings has been changing at a rapid pace. Technologies have evolved and changed to broadly expand the options available to architects, designers and contractors when they create a new structure. More and more, designs incorporate recycled materials, high efficiency windows, alternative energy and other techniques which reduce the impact these new buildings have on natural resources, and make them more self-sustaining. Such building designs are energy efficient, conserve water, and are multi-functional. The design innovations which have been developed have also evolved into building standards and guidelines, including privately run programs and adopted building codes. Structured programs are available for both residential and commercial/industrial/institutional designs, which provide a rating system for the level of sustainability built into a structure. The most commonly used programs are currently the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program for non-residential development, and the Green Building program for residential structures. These programs are voluntary, and are likely to change and evolve as new technologies are developed. The State of California has also amended its building codes and developed the CalGreen Codes to improve resource efficiency in building design. This program is mandatory, and will lead to highly efficient building construction throughout the State, including La Quinta. The City's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan also relies on the use of these improved efficiency systems to reduce emissions in buildings in the future. These programs and standards provide the City with an opportunity to build resource efficiency into all future building designs.



Two energy reducing techniques particularly effective in La Quinta are active and passive solar design. Passive solar design relies on the design and placement of a building to take advantage of the sun in the winter, and to provide shade in the summer. Energy Star windows that insulate homes; the use of thermal chimneys to help with air circulation; solar tubes to capture natural light; the use of green roofs (roofs that are planted to insulate from heat; or white roofs that

reflect the sun and reduce heat gain are all passive solar techniques). Active solar design is the use of renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, to produce power and reduce energy consumption. At the City's Vista Dunes Apartments project, solar panels were installed on the roofs to reduce the tenant costs for electricity. In addition to residential roofs, carports in apartment or commercial projects provide excellent places to install solar panels. They are also an excellent way to shade vehicles from the sun, and help reduce the "heat island" effect – the increase in temperature that occurs when asphalt absorbs the sun's energy. Promoting passive and active solar design can result in energy cost-savings for the home or building owner, and provide local opportunities for alternative electricity production to the IID system.

Public Spaces

One of the most important features of livable community design are attractive, engaging, and safe public spaces. These include walkways or sidewalks, plazas and courtyards, parks and public facilities, and the "in-between" places or public areas between buildings and private property. These areas need to be vibrant, dynamic, and active, and perhaps most importantly, need to make people feel safe. Public spaces should emphasize a destination or place, rather than leftover space. Creating place requires many of the elements discussed earlier, including appropriate land uses, and good building design. The scale and placement of buildings must define the space, and also create a sense of excitement or curiosity for the people entering it.

These spaces include the roadways that connect projects. As a result, lane widths, parking aisles, bike lanes and sidewalks must be appropriately sized in relation to the vertical facades of buildings. Street trees, light standards, street furniture and signage must convey an invitation to stay within that space. Storefronts that appear to be

part of the walkway – with much use of glass, or open doors which blur the boundary between the store and the walkway, the shade of awnings or canopies, and the interest created by varying storefronts lead people from one store to the next. This also creates a safe and comfortable atmosphere for pedestrians or bicyclists. A plaza or square brings people together, and should be accessed from multiple directions, which further enhances a pedestrian's ability to travel from one place to the other.

Appropriate design of public spaces can also lead to conserving energy and water, and enhancing community character. A livable public space provides improved safety and security in the community improves the health of residents by encouraging more walking and exercise; and reduces impacts on air, energy and water resources.

Transportation

The emissions from automobiles are the single largest contributor to the City's air pollution. As the City works toward being more self-sustaining, protecting its air quality must be considered. The City's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan includes a number of strategies to reduce the amount of air emissions from motor vehicles, all of which are designed to help to reduce emissions. A sample of the measures considered in the Plan include:

- The replacement of City and private gasoline vehicles with electric vehicles.
- Synchronizing traffic signals to improve traffic flow and reduce idling.
- Expending multiuse paths and golf cart routes.

A large part of the effort toward reducing impacts on air quality involves enabling alternative modes of transportation (such as trails for pedestrians and bicyclists, golf cart and Neighborhood Electric Vehicles), enhancing access to public transit, and improving connections between residences and these alternative modes of transportation.

Alternative Modes of Transportation

One of the best and effective ways to reduce traffic, and air pollution, in a community is to promote alternative modes of transportation. Alternative transportation includes ride-sharing, carpooling, vanpooling, public transit, bicycling, walking, using hybrid or electric vehicles, golf carts and Neighborhood Electric Vehicles (NEV's). NEV's

and golf carts are practical on low volume streets, within gated communities, and for local trips.

There are two primary methods to promote alternative modes of transportation: providing infrastructure to support it, and promoting programs to encourage it.

Existing multi-use paths throughout the city and Sphere of Influence can be used for bicycle, golf carts, and walking. Class I bicycle and golf cart lanes, which are off-road facilities, are safe and separated from traffic, and often used by pedestrians as well. The majority of bicycle and golf cart lanes in the City currently, however, are Class II lanes, which are on-road lanes. These are not appropriate for pedestrians, but are often located next to sidewalks. The City's existing Golf Cart Transportation Program includes long term plans for additional routes which would connect much of the City by golf cart. The expansion of Golf Cart Routes and multi-use paths, especially those which interconnect, is critical to encouraging people to use them. It is important that new routes be safe, easily accessible, and that new and existing development accommodate the use of alternative vehicles. State legislation now requires that the City consider all forms of transportation in its street design, to assure that alternative transportation routes are available and interconnect in the community. This is an important new development in encouraging alternative transportation. (Please see the Circulation Element for a detailed discussion of Golf Cart Routes, Trails and Complete Streets.) During the life of this General Plan, new technologies will evolve which will expand the possibilities for alternative vehicles. Flexibility in the City's development standards and policies will assure that new development will be able to take advantage of these new technologies.

Public transit is another form of transportation which has great potential for reducing air pollution. The City's and region's transit provider currently (2010) operates an all-alternative fuel fleet, and has been a leader in developing alternative fuel technologies for buses. Service routes are directly linked to demand, and have generally been limited to major arterial roadways. It is important that the City

encourage the expansion of the route system to make transit easier to access throughout the City. In the short term, the City may need to consider locating park and ride lots in existing or future parking lots adjacent to existing bus stops in order to facilitate the interconnection between un-served areas and major arterials. Increased ridership will be dependent on quick and easy access that links neighborhoods to local destinations such as employment and recreation centers.

Alternative transportation programs extend beyond bus service expansion. Transportation Demand Management, which requires large employers to provide incentives and facilities to reduce the number of employee vehicle trips they create, is described in more detail in the Circulation Element. The City can also develop programs, and require private development to include programs, which support alternative transportation, including alternative fuel or charging stations, golf cart or NEV parking, or preferred carpool parking areas.

Transit Oriented Development

Transit oriented developments are meant to be dynamic places that provide mixed uses, compact development, and enhanced public spaces. These features reinforce the positive experience for pedestrians by providing visual stimulating environments, a sense of place, and a sense of security. In order to create dynamic places, transit oriented development should offer mixed uses that provide services at all times of the day, and provide multiple housing options to encourage residential uses. Existing shopping centers with large parking lots, and underutilized areas are perfect places to create these environments, particularly since access to major transportation corridors are critical to their success.

Retrofitting Existing Development

The majority of the lands within the City are built out. Older buildings were developed with inefficient technology. Existing residential, commercial and institutional facilities can gradually become more efficient by retrofitting buildings with new water and energy saving technologies. There are many incentive programs available for helping convert to newer technologies today, and these types of programs are sure to expand in the future, as demand increases and costs for alternative technology decreases.

Retrofitting for Water Conservation

Many developments were built prior to the need for conserving water, and include landscaping and irrigation systems that have a high water demand. The CVWD reports that 80% of water usage comes from outdoor landscaping. The District has created incentives for the conversion of lawns to drought tolerant ground covers, sprinkler nozzle replacement, and "smart controllers." Smart Controllers can cut water usage by 30% by automatically adjusting irrigation systems based on historic weather data. The City is participating in the program by fast-tracking the review of landscape designs for these conversions in master planned communities and commercial projects. The expansion of these programs will continue through the buildout of the City, and can be implemented as Sphere of Influence lands are annexed into the City.

Retrofitting Energy Systems

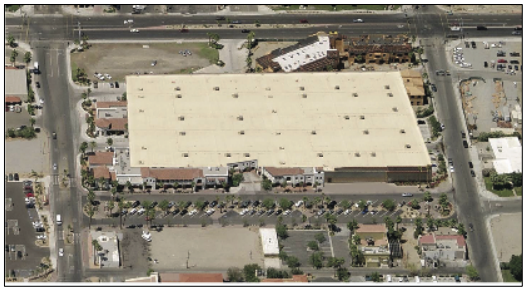
There are many incentives available for residents and businesses that install energy efficient appliances, lights, and active solar systems. The City and IID provide programs for reducing electricity, including energy audits, rebates for Energy Star appliances and air conditioning units. Commercial rebates are also available for Energy Start thermostats, commercial and industrial HVAC equipment, lighting and energy efficient motors. Federal programs also provide tax credits for business and residents using Energy Star products. These rebates and tax incentives may change over the years, but can be effectively used to retrofit existing development.

Installing solar systems or other renewable energy systems on buildings is another method becoming increasingly accessible for individual residents and businesses. The year-round sunshine in La Quinta makes it an ideal location for solar technologies. IID offers rebate incentives to qualifying projects to help reduce the initial cost of installing these systems. State and federal programs also provide rebates and tax credits to consumers who install solar energy systems, as well as geothermal pumps, small wind systems, and residential fuel cell and micro-turbine systems.[6] The City can continue to encourage the use of energy saving incentives today and in the future to reduce dependence on traditional electric power generation.

6 www.iid.com

Retrofitting Building Design

As described above, the development of mixed use projects, which bring residents closer to their jobs and shopping, can have a tremendous impact on improving the City's livability. Although new projects are the simplest way to achieve this goal, it is also possible to retrofit existing projects to achieve the same positive result.



The range of options is extensive, and can include the conversion of a single family home in the Village to an office, to major changes to an existing shopping center to provide a better environment, and incorporate residential development. Existing development on Highway 111, for example, may have an opportunity to change in the coming years. That change may not require demolition, but may occur through the addition of buildings which provide greater flexibility of use. By adding to existing projects, the City can expand its development options, both residential and commercial, and reduce its dependence on the automobile at the same time. New structures can be wrapped around existing commercial buildings to create completely new environments, and create a residential development next to existing commercial uses. Driveways between projects can be enhanced to provide better pedestrian access, and buildings constructed adjacent to these new sidewalks to provide a pedestrian scaled environment. These projects can also be connected, even across Highway 111, by street trees and other landscaping elements which make the area more pedestrian friendly. Please also see the Land Use Element for a more detailed description of the potential for mixed use development in existing commercial areas, including the Village and Highway 111.

The City also has a number of walled and gated communities, many of which are adjacent to existing commercial development, schools or other public facilities. In most cases, however, these adjacent facilities

are not directly accessible. A simple design retrofit can encourage pedestrian and bicycle access to these facilities: the creation of a pedestrian gate in a wall can eliminate the need to drive through and around to that same adjacent commercial, school or public use.

Retrofitting City Facilities

The City has an opportunity to lead by example in developing and implementing resource efficient policies and programs. La Quinta has made strides towards this goal by implementing its Landscaping Ordinance, Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan and Sustainability Program. These programs must be flexible and have the ability to evolve and grow over time, as funds permit and opportunities arise. Please also see the Air Quality Element.

The City should regularly monitor and amend the Landscape Ordinance to abide by new technologies and requirements of the Coachella Valley Water District, and should retrofit existing City properties and new buildings with water saving irrigation technology, recycled water when possible, and reduced use of turf in landscaping. The City can also reduce indoor water use by installing water efficient fixtures, such as low flow toilets, sinks, and showers, provided in California GreenCodes.

Energy conservation should also be a priority. Many of the measures used to conserve energy will also help the City meet the targeted reductions in the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan. The Plan provides a list of measures, such as the installation of solar panels on building rooftops and carports, upgrading HVAC units with energy efficient systems, and converting the City's fleet of vehicles to alternative energy vehicles. The City can capitalize on rebate programs and other incentives to reduce costs associated with these programs.

The City should encourage carpooling and bicycling to work for City employees, and work with SunLine Transit to improve bus routes. Incentives such as priority parking for carpools, or free bus passes for transit travelers can change the staff's behavior and help to reduce air pollution in the City.

A Healthy City

Across California, families are continuing to face rising health care costs and diminished quality of life associated with poor dietary habits, which have led to health problems such as obesity and increased diabetes and related illness, particularly in children. As a result of these escalating costs, cities are beginning to understand their role in helping promote healthier lifestyles for their residents. There has been a growing awareness that land use policy and the built environment are linked to public health issues, and that cities have the ability to positively influence both.

The effort centers on the principle that cities can influence comprehensive policy to address improving the health of their residents. The principles emphasize that a healthy city requires a multi-disciplinary approach which ranges from project design to access to healthy food. The issues associated with a healthy city are far ranging, and include:

1. Parks and recreation facilities in all neighborhoods, accessible to all residents.
2. Quality housing for all residents, at prices all income groups can afford.
3. Access to allow all residents adequate medical services.
4. Access to healthy foods.
5. Jobs in reasonable proximity to residents' homes.
6. Neighborhoods and public places.
7. An interconnected, complete and varied transportation system that provides access to transit, walking and bicycling options.
8. A healthy environment free of pollution or health hazards.

Access to healthy foods, pedestrian friendly environments and adequate recreation are all factors related to improving the health of residents. For example, a city can improve its residents' health by encouraging inter-connected walking paths in and through proposed projects; developing a community garden in a city park; and implementing exercise classes at its community center. Cities can also influence other agencies to improve health – working with school districts to change lunch options in schools to include more fresh fruit and vegetables; or encouraging major employers to include workout rooms in their buildings. Of particular concern in cities is the access to fresh and healthy foods for poorer populations. Reaching those economic segments through community gardens and farmers markets, as well as school lunch programs, is critical to the effort. The principles of a healthy city tie closely to those of resource efficient development

and a livable community, and should all work together to improve the quality of life for all residents.

On a more local level, the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Cities Campaign was recently established to help city officials adopt policies that promote healthy environments and physical activity within their community. In 2010, La Quinta joined HEAL, and committed to promoting the Campaign's healthy living policies. The City has committed to promoting healthier food choices, providing adequate recreation and wellness opportunities, and regulating the built environment to encourage physical activity. A number of programs and activities can be implemented to promote and expand the HEAL program in La Quinta, including:

- Promoting farmers' markets. Farmers markets bring fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, and fresh baked goods directly to their consumers. The City currently has a Farmers Market in Old Town, and should encourage others in activity centers in other parts of the City, to broaden their reach.

- Creating a community garden. Community gardens provide space in public parks (or at the Civic Center) for residents to grow their own fruits and vegetables. They are also great public spaces for social interaction and learning.
- Promoting recreational activity. La Quinta provides numerous parks, trails and open spaces for residents to walk, play sports, and enjoy the outdoors. The Fitness Center and Senior Center also provide a range of options, both through organized classes and individual exercise. Pedestrian connectivity with residential areas is vital for encouraging residents to use these facilities.
- Providing safe routes to school. The State's Safe Routes to School Program provides funding for improvements which make children's walk or bicycle ride to school safer. The City has constructed several such improvements, and will continue to apply for funding in the future.

The City is also implementing HEAL with its own staff, and has offered:

- Employee Health Fairs and Health Education Information.
- Fitness programs for employees that may include exercise, physical activity through walking, and weight loss components.
- Daily 15 minute walking breaks in the Civic Center Campus.
- An Employee Assistance Program for help with addictions, work or relationship conflicts, emotional, legal, financial and health issues.
- Use of the La Quinta Fitness Center.

The employee wellness programs enacted by the City can spread throughout the community. City employees who participate in health programs will be able to share their experiences and the benefits of healthy living with friends and family.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Expanding the City's livability will be an ongoing challenge throughout the build out of the City and its Sphere of Influence. It will require a multi-pronged approach which affects and improves all components of the community, existing and future. Implementing such principles in the City will change and improve its character, providing the opportunity to tie existing neighborhoods to new mixed use and commercial projects.

The built environment has a tremendous effect on residents' health and safety, and planning for and constructing a built environment that encourages walking, biking, and other forms of activity is critical to improving the quality of life for everyone in La Quinta.

The success of future projects is entirely tied to their safety and connectivity – paths, trails and sidewalks that are unsafe, do not connect to interesting places or do not connect at all are of no value. The City can play an important role in assessing the safety and connectivity of public trails and sidewalks, and including the construction of missing or damaged sections/connections in the Capital Improvement Program.

GOALS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

GOAL SC-1

A community that provides the best possible quality of life for all its residents.

❖ Policy SC-1.1

Continue to work with the CVWD on water conservation measures.

- *Program SC-1.1.a:* Review the Landscape Ordinance every two years, and update as necessary to maintain consistency with State and CVWD standards.

- *Program SC 1.1.b:* Develop joint incentive programs with CVWD for water conservation programs, including landscaping retrofits for individual homes and master planned projects, irrigation improvements and indoor plumbing fixtures. Consider allocating City funds to these incentive programs on a matching basis with CVWD.

❖ Policy SC-1.2

Reduce water consumption at a minimum consistent with the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan (also see Air Quality Element).

- *Program SC-1.2.a:* Implement quantifiable water conservation measures at all City facilities.

- *Program SC-1.2.b:* Consider financial incentives for new development and existing homes and projects as funds allow.

- *Program SC-1.2.c:* Aggressively pursue grants and other outside funding sources for City-funded and private sector water conservation improvements.

❖ Policy SC-1.3

Encourage the use of more environmentally friendly storm water management techniques such as bioswales, permeable surfaces and other methods as they are developed, in all new development.

- *Program SC-1.3.a:* The Public Works Department shall prepare and distribute materials on environmentally friendly storm water management techniques for new development.

❖ Policy SC-1.4

Reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions at a minimum consistent with the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan (also see Air Quality Element)..

- *Program SC-1.4.a:* Require all new development proposals to demonstrate consistency with the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan.

- *Program SC-1.4.b:* Revise the Transportation Demand Ordinance to current standards, and implement it with all new qualifying projects.

- *Program SC-1.4.c:* Develop programs to encourage and incentivize the installation of energy efficient appliances and fixtures, green roofs, white roofs and solar panels on residential, commercial, institutional and resort buildings.

❖ Policy SC-1.5

All new development shall include resource efficient development principles.

- *Program SC-1.5.a:* All new development shall be constructed to meet or exceed CalGreen Building Codes.

- *Program SC-1.5.b:* Amend the Zoning Ordinance to provide incentives and development standard concessions for mixed use or energy efficient design.

- *Program SC-1.5.c:* New development projects shall include vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle connections to the greatest extent possible, both through the project and connecting to adjacent projects.

- *Program SC-1.5.d:* New commercial and mixed use projects shall incorporate useable public spaces, and interconnect those public spaces consistent with resource efficient design principles.

❖ Policy SC-1.6

Expand the City's alternative transportation network.

- *Program SC-1.6.a:* Assess the current gaps in the City's multi-use path and sidewalk system, and program improvements to connect those gaps into the Capital Improvement Program.

- *Program SC-1.6.b:* Encourage existing walled communities to include pedestrian gates and paths to adjacent development to improve connectivity.

- *Program SC-1.6.c:* Expand the Golf Cart Routes to interconnect throughout the City to the greatest extent possible.

- *Program SC-1.6.d:* Work with SunLine Transit Agency to expand service into La Quinta neighborhoods ahead of demand.

❖ Policy SC-1.7

Encourage the retrofitting of existing buildings and projects with resource efficient design principles to the greatest extent possible.

- *Program SC-1.7.a:* Amend the Zoning Ordinance to provide incentives for the redevelopment of existing projects to include residential development, pedestrian and alternative transportation connections and improvements, and other design features.

- *Program SC-1.7.b:* Develop an enhanced program for the processing of entitlements for redevelopment projects which incorporates substantial resource efficient components, or propose conversion to mixed use.

- *Program SC-1.7.c:* Develop a financial incentive program for creative redevelopment of commercial projects into mixed use projects, particularly those that provide added economic development benefit to the City.

❖ Policy SC-1.8

Expand the City's participation in Healthy City programs.

- *Program SC-1.8.a:* Implement Healthy City principles throughout the community, to the greatest extent feasible.

- *Program SC-1.8.b:* Coordinate park and trail improvement plans to assure connectivity between parks and the neighborhoods they serve.

- *Program SC-1.8.c:* Encourage farmers' markets outside the Village, accessible to all parts of the City.

- *Program SC-1.8.d:* Plan and implement a community garden project at the Civic Center. Monitor its success, and implement at other City parks if successful.

- *Program SC-1.8.e:* Work with Desert Sands and Coachella Valley School Districts to improve food selection in lunch programs, exercise programs, and Safe Routes to School programs.

RELATED GOALS

As described above, this Element relates to others in this General Plan. The following Goals, and their associated policies and programs, are closely related to those of this Element.

GOAL LU-2: High quality design that complements and enhances the City.

GOAL LU-3: Safe and identifiable neighborhoods that provide a sense of place.

GOAL ED-3: Innovative land uses in the Village and on Highway 111.

GOAL CIR-2: A circulation system that includes connected transit, alternative vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian networks.

GOAL PR-1: A comprehensive system of parks, and recreation facilities and services that meet the active and passive needs of all residents and visitors.

GOAL AQ-1: A reduction in all air emissions generated within the City.

GOAL WR-1: The efficient use and conservation of the City's water resources.


La Quinta
GEM of the DESERT